

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

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SUBJECT: ASTRONAUT CERNAN'S VISIT TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA

REF: PRAGUE 2390-C

1. U.S. ASTRONAUT EUGENE CERNAN FACED TEST OF COOL OFFICIAL WELCOME IN HOMELAND OF HIS GRANDFATHERS THIS WEEK AND DEMONSTRATED FULLY HIS POSSESSION OF PARTICULAR BRAND OF CALM COURAGE, ADAPTABILITY, AND PERCEPTIVE INTELLIGENCE WHICH HAS BECOME HALLMARK OF AMERICA'S ASTRONAUTS.

2. GOC DEMONSTRATED ITS UNDERSTANDING OF POTENTIAL LOCAL PUBLIC IMPACT OF CERNAN VISIT BY SEVERLY LIMITING ENCOUNTERS WITH CZECHS AND SLOVAKS AND DENYING PERMISSION FOR REQUESTED FORMAL PRESS CONFERENCE.

3. PRESS COVERAGE PERMITTED DURING VISIT ALLOWED BRIEF CTK NOTICE OF CERNAN TRIP TO HOME VILLAGE OF PATERNAL GRANDFATHER (VYSOKA NAD KYSUCOU) IN SLOVAKIA AND PASSING REFERENCE TO RECEPTION BY CZECH AND SLOVAK ACADEMIES OF SCIENCE. NO TELEVISION COVERAGE WAS PERMITTED AND RADIO INTERVIEW SET UP BY EMBASSY WAS CANCELLED. ATTEMPTS BY EMBASSY TO CIRCUMVENT PRESS BAN ALLOWED

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CERNAN TO GRANT INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS TO TECHNICAL NEWSPAPER

(TECHNICKE NOVINY, BRATISLAVA), DAILY PRESS (MLADA FRONTA, PRAGUE), AND TECHNICAL MAGAZINE (LETECTVI, PRAGUE). INTERVIEW BY TECHNICKE TYDENIK, PRAGUE WAS ACCEPTED THEN CANCELLED BY CHIEF EDITOR.

4. LOCAL AP AND TIME STRINGERS AND AFP CORRESPONDENT INTERVIEWED CERNAN PRIOR TO DEPARTURE, AND WILL REPORTEDLY SEEK CLARIFICATION ON LOCAL PRESS BAN FROM MFA PRESS DEPARTMENT.

5. PROGRAMS AT ACADEMIES OF SCIENCE IN BRATISLAVA, SEPTEMBER 30, AND PRAGUE, OCTOBER 3, WERE CORRECT, CORDIAL AND LIMITED TO ACADEMY PERSONNEL. CAMERAS AND TAPE RECORDERS WERE CONSPICUOUSLY PRESENT AND IN USE, BUT EMBOFFS PRESENT IDENTIFIED NO PRESS REPRESENTATIVES. AIRLINES AND HOTEL PERSONNEL HAD BEEN THOROUGHLY BRIEFED, TO EXTENT THAT AIRPORT PERSONNEL WHO OBVIOUSLY KNEW CERNAN ON SIGHT PROVIDED VIP SERVICE WITH NO SPOKEN WORD OF RECOGNITION.

6. RECEPTION IN VYSOKA NAD KYSUCOU BY CHAIRMEN OF LOCAL NATIONAL COMMITTEE AND NATIONAL FRONT ORGANIZATIONS WAS SINGLE INSTANCE OF PERSONAL CONTACT BETWEEN ASTRONAUT CERNAN AND ANY GOVERNMENTAL REPRESENTATIVE. FAMILY OF CERNAN WAS NOTIFIED BY LOCAL OFFICIALS OF IMPENDING ARRIVAL TWO HOURS PRIOR TO FORMAL RECEPTION. CERNAN RESPONDED CORRECTLY TO SITUATION BY POLITELY REFUSING INVITATION TO NEARBY REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS AND SPENDING BULK OF TIME IN VILLAGE WITH RELATIVES, INCLUDING THREE HOURS IN LOCAL HOME ACCOMPANIED ONLY BY EMBOFF AND NSAS REP.

7. EMBASSY CONSIDERS CERNAN'S SELF-CONTROL AND CONSISTENT ADHERANCE TO PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF PERSONAL BEHAVIOR, INCLUDING HIS PRODIGIOUS PERFORMANCE IN PERSONALLY AUTOGRAPHING NEARLY 3000 PHOTOGRAPHS, TRULY ADMIRABLE. CUT OFF FROM NORMAL PRESS COVERAGE, CERNAN SHIFTED AND RE-DOUBLED HIS ENERGIES IN MAKING PERSONAL CONTACTS. HE DEMONSTRATED DEDICATION AND VIRTUOSITY BY HIS WILLINGNESS TO REPRESENT HIS COUNTRY UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES SO DISTINCTLY AT VARIANCE, FOR EXAMPLE, WITH HIS RECENT RECEPTION BY PRESIDENT CEAUCESCU IN ROMANIA.

8. CERNAN'S ELOQUENCE IN DETAILED DISCUSSIONS WITH SCIENTISTS FROM INSTITUTES OF GEOPHYSICS, ASTRONOMY AND METALLIC MATERIALS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN BRATISLAVA; AND ASTRONOMICAL INSTITUTE IN PRAGUE WAS ESSENTIAL TO NON-PR AIMS OF HIS VISIT. CERNAN'S FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH SOVIETS ON APOLLO-SOYUZ PROJECT PROVIDED USEFUL EXAMPLES IN DISCUSSIONS OF CONTRASTING US AND USSR PROGRAMS. AUDIENCES WERE KNOWLEDGEABLE, SYMPATHETIC AND DEEPLY APPRECIATIVE OF CERNAN'S PRESENCE IN COUNTRY.

9. COMMENT: EMBASSY BELIEVES COLD-SHOULDER GIVEN CERNAN WAS DIRECT

RESULT OF CLAIMS AGREEMENT INTERRUPTION. DECISION TO RESTRICT
GOVERNMENT CONTACT TO VILLAGE LEVEL WAS ALMOST CERTAINLY A CONSCIOUS
GOC DECISION REFLECTING REACTION TO EVENTS IN SENATE FINANCE
COMMITTEE. CERNAN'S SITUATION MIGHT BE COMPARED TO A MAN COMING
UNDER AIR ATTACK IN THE MIDST OF TRIUMPHFUL MOTORCADE. HE PERFORMED
BRILLIANTLY.
PERRY

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